

**‘They Returned As Millions’: Bolivian Indigenous Movements and Nation Building in the  
New Millennium**

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“Supporters of President Evo Morales marching above the city of La Paz, Bolivia on October 20, 2008. La Paz is Bolivia’s capital and largest urban area , home to over 1.5 million people, living at nearly 12,000 feet above sea level.” <[http://www.boston.com/bigpicture/2009/02/bolivia\\_and\\_its\\_new\\_constituti.html](http://www.boston.com/bigpicture/2009/02/bolivia_and_its_new_constituti.html)>

## Introduction

At the core of the Southern Andean Mountains, Bolivia has been a nation accented with a particularly tumultuous past. Eighty four presidents from 1825 to the present day and even more military coups have punctuated its post-Independence political history. Amerindians in Bolivia have been involved in a constant struggle since the colonial period as political authorities and posterior systems have been notorious for indigenous persecution and exploitation. Through different modes of protest and empowerment, the indigenous peoples of Bolivia have endeavored to regain their hereditary rights such as communal lands, autonomy, and negotiated rule. In Bolivia today, indigenous peoples are finally beginning to grasp these rights they have sought for the last 500 years. This paper traces the roots of indigenous revolution by citing examples of indigenous resistance from the end of the colonial period to the present day. I find that continuities have resounded, illustrating the lasting memories and legacies of autonomy that indigenous leaders provoked. Rebellion is part of the indigenous identity in Bolivia. It is a source of pride and, in many ways, of survival. In Bolivia today, indigenous peoples are using their ethnic identities to their advantage in order to gain power through equal access to government, new avenues in education, and new legislation that will, with anticipation, continue to work for them.

The central beliefs behind these historic revolts have been anchored in the persistence of pre-Colombian perspectives of the world. Although forces have attempted to quash these ideals, throughout time, they have evolved and remained. Since the 1780s, particularly in the areas surrounding Cochabamba, La Paz, and El Alto, a pattern of protest has ensued.<sup>1</sup> The people who rise up today do so because they are continually subjugated but they find power in the tradition

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<sup>1</sup> Forrest Hylton and Sinclair Thomson, *Revolutionary Horizons: Popular Struggle in Bolivia*, (London: Verso, 2007)

of insurrections that their ancestors have bestowed upon them. The Quechua word *pachakuti* has been present in the Bolivian consciousness as a motivator which has supported and made sense of the impetus and expected outcomes of indigenous insurrections, as well as other world shaking events, throughout Bolivian history. Aymara sociologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui explains this process of transformation through seemingly opposing words like “renovation” and “catastrophe”.<sup>2</sup> Thus, Amerindians in what is now modern Bolivia have clung to this idea that turbulence, or destruction, is necessary to complement and bring about transformation and, in the end, balance. Indigenous peoples have worked within and outside of the system, through cycle upon cycle of political promises and persecution as the predominant creole elites engaged in different approaches to nation building.

The legacy and memories of the Tupac Katari rebellion and other movements of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century live on today in the consciousness of the indigenous groups that continue to fight for their rights. The roots of these late colonial memories can be traced back to the same cities that have been hot beds of political action in our own time, such as La Paz. Since Independence, indigenous people were largely used and were the backbone of the new nation. As the majority of the population claimed indigenous heritage, they were the ones who were expected to support the new state through manual labor and tribute payments. Access to land was the main issue that caused tension between the indigenous communities and the multiple creole regimes.<sup>3</sup> In colonial times, indigenous peoples had been, inarguably, suppressed but claims to communal lands remained more intact than they would after independence. Small peasant movements

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<sup>2</sup> Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, “Aymara Past, Aymara Future,” *NACLA Report on the Americas*, 25:3 (1991): 21.

<sup>3</sup> Brooke Larson, *Trials of Nation Making :Liberalism, Race, and Ethnicity in the Andes, 1810-1910*, (New York: Cambridge, 2008) 213-245. Creoles were people of Spanish descent who were born in the New World and were not allowed to hold political office in the colonial period. During the revolutions against Spain throughout in the early 1800s, Creoles led the army’s against the Spanish with major help from the indigenous masses. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Creole regimes in power subjugated the Amerindians who had fought alongside them for independence.

began to organize to recover their ancestral land through non-violent means, searching for proof of titles within the colonial archives. Intriguingly at this time, leaders like the Aymara Pablo Zárate Willka allied with the Liberal creoles and led hostile, and sometimes unruly, but all together, oppressed peasants who wanted nothing more to be true “citizens”, with all the rights that word entails.

These tensions between the ruling oligarchic governments, land owners, business, and peasant and indigenous communities continued throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the revolution of 1952 tin miners backed the middle-class based National Revolutionary Movement (MNR) and overthrew the government, nationalizing the mines and passing a series of agrarian reforms. After the revolution and through the rest of the century, indigenous peoples continued to suffer at the hands of both violent dictatorships and harsh economic policies. Such controlling forces only sparked a fire that led to organization among and across indigenous groups, leading to the uprisings that began in the year 2000. The ‘Water Wars’ and ‘Gas Wars’ were two major events that exemplified the rising political powers of the indigenous peasantry.

In this paper, I will first examine the roots of indigenous uprisings in a historical context by looking at the key components of the rebellions of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and the Revolution of 1952. Then, I will discuss the growing social unrest at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by focusing on the neo-liberal policies of the 1980s and the foreign intervention that they brought about. I will describe forms of grassroots organization which helped usher Bolivia into a new stage of social and political change. I delve into the uprisings that sparked what Forrest Hylton and Sinclair Thomson, along with other scholars, would call “Bolivia’s third

revolutionary moment” in which collective action was at the forefront.<sup>4</sup> In the last sections I will discuss the coming to power of Evo Morales and the implementation of new rights as I examine the realities indigenous Bolivians face today. I discuss changes in displays of indigenous culture, the status of indigenous women, and continuing indigenous political organization. I conclude that Bolivia is still a changing nation and now, like never before in the history of this plurinational state, indigenous peoples in Bolivia have been able to claim tangible power and have become the new face of their self defined nation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **The Aymara and Quechua Tradition of Revolt**

In colonial times, the *mita* was a revolving system of obligatory labor in which indigenous men were required to work for the Crown, often on low or with even no wages. The *mita* was hard on both the *ayllus*, or traditional community units, that hosted the men who came to do work and on the communities and families who lost men for months out of the year. The *mita* was just one of the forces that sparked indigenous insurrections such as the one led by Tupac Katari in what was then Upper Peru in 1777 to 1780, where the Potosí mining district was located. Another major source of discontent was the abusive *repartimiento de comercio*, or *repartos*, legalized in 1756, generally the forced distribution of merchandise among *ayllu* Indians.<sup>5</sup>

Tómas Katari took control of the area of Chayanta, partially under the orders of the Spanish, and attempted to maintain semi-autonomous control of the region, as they protested against being taken advantage of by local officials who they thought were inflating the

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<sup>4</sup> Hylton and Thomson, *Revolutionary Horizons*, 20.; James Dunkerley, “Evo Morales, the Two Bolivias’ and the Third Bolivian Revolution,” *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 39:1 (2007): 146-157.

<sup>5</sup> Kenneth Andrien, *Andean Worlds: Indigenous History, Culture, and Consciousness Under Spanish Rule, 1532-1825*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001) 96, 202-06.

population's tribute assessments. As part of the protest in the region, Katari was dispatched by his people to march to Buenos Aires so that he may register their complaints against these corrupt officials and to ask the viceroy to investigate the wrongdoings going on in the region.<sup>6</sup> After Katari was captured and murdered, allegedly by the Spanish, the *forastero* Julián Apaza took over the native leadership, under the name Túpac Katari. Two allies and leaders from the south, Diego Cristóbal Miguel and Andrés Tupac Amaru, eventually surrendered to the Spanish and were granted a pardon which left Katari in the dust. He was the one who was closer to the disgruntled masses so it was he who was made the example. The rebel leader was beheaded and his body parts were sent off to other areas of the viceroyalty in order to scare other aspiring rebels. But in the collective memory of Aymaras and Quechuas the phrase "I will return as millions," apparently uttered by Katari before his execution, resonated.<sup>7</sup> His legacy would live on, but not in the way that the Spanish who dismembered his body had intended. For centuries to come, indigenous peoples clung to the ideals of autonomy which the rebels of the 1780s failed to seize.

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, battles for Independence were underway throughout Latin America. This period was a severely unstable one throughout the region, and Bolivia was no exception. The *ayllu* in Bolivia has been a powerful unit throughout time and in the process of nation building in this period, indigenous communities contributed greatly to the economic survival of the new nation through head-taxes and, in turn, were able to hold on to their land for the better part of the century. According to historian Brooke Larson, in the 1846 census about 51 percent of the population was both indigenous and living in an *ayllu* and, by 1877, indigenous

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>7</sup> Hylton and Thomson, *Revolutionary Horizons*.

peoples were paying 75 percent of all taxes.<sup>8</sup> Without the continuing tribute payments, the new republic probably would have not survived. In the 1860s, the economy began to turn around and creoles and foreign investors aimed at controlling land and natural resources, turned on the Amerindians who had supported the new republic. The land reform act of 1874, in short, gave indigenous peoples the “right” to own private property, abolished the autonomy of the *ayllus*, and stopped tribute but established a property tax which ended up costing the communities more.<sup>9</sup> Indigenous groups protested the Conservatives in power in various ways. As they were now subject to new tax laws they worked within the system in attempts to reclaim their land through legal loopholes. There were also threats of violence, particularly in the mining center of Potosí. Larson posits the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century actually sparked grassroots movements by enacting liberal laws that encouraged now landless Aymara peasants to seek colonial land titles that would deem their communal lands “indivisible”.<sup>10</sup> Liberals used this to their advantage in the 1896 as they “allied” with indigenous leader Pablo Zárate Willka and the groups who followed him as they fought militarily against the Conservatives after they had lost politically.<sup>11</sup> This “alliance” during the civil war only deepened the divide between the creoles and indigenous peoples.

By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the indigenous peoples of Bolivia were still far from integrated into the nation. In a sense, their lives were becoming gradually worse. As a result of various land reform laws put through in the last thirty years of the previous century, they had lost their communal land. Land would become the motivation behind the continual struggle and organization throughout the twentieth century. As communities were broken up, the autonomy

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<sup>8</sup> Larson, *Trials of Nation Making*, 205-06.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 227-28.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 229-245.

that they ensued for centuries disappeared. The people went to work, they were not slaves but, in many cases, they may well have been. In places like Tiraque, a province in the Cochabamba highlands, peasant farmers who owned small plots of land controlled by larger hacienda owner's farmed coca that supplied those who toiled in the mines.<sup>12</sup> People of indigenous descent became proletariats and they organized. They allied with groups in the upper echelons of society so that they might gain more political, social, and economic rights. Out of these alliances came the revolution of 1952.

The Bolivian Revolution of 1952, one of the great social uprisings of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, was a multiclass war fought greatly over years of government control land and its resources. The People's Revolutionary Movement (MNR) sought to gain power and was backed by indigenous peasantry, mainly miners, who had been continually oppressed by the rich tin barons who they had worked for in the mines and also the governments who had subsequently massacred union uprisings multiple times in the thirty years or so preceding the revolutionary overthrow.<sup>13</sup> The miners aligned with the revolutionary movement not only because their quality of life was poor but because there had been major massacres in the decade before the revolution. In the massacre at the Catavi mine in 1942, the army fired upon workers who were on strike demanding wage increases.<sup>14</sup> Indigenous peasants in the countryside also rebelled against wealthy hacienda owners. In the coming years, the MNR, led by middle-class men, aligned itself with two main organizations, the Trade Union Federation of Bolivian Mine Workers (FSTMB) and the Worker's Revolutionary Party (POR). The POR was a Trotskyist organization that believed

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<sup>12</sup> Maria L. Lagos, *Autonomy and Power: the Dynamics of Class and Culture in Rural Bolivia*, (Philadelphia (Pa.): University of Pennsylvania, 1994) 26-46.

<sup>13</sup> See June Nash, *We Eat the Mines and the Mines Eat Us: Dependency and Exploitation in Bolivian Tin Mines*, (New York: Columbia University Press. 1993). 17-56.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 75.



overall in worker's rights, particularly the right to control their own workforce. According to Hylton and Thomson, the POR's main program, the Thesis of Pulacayo, "proclaimed the tactical necessity of a united front in which proletarians would receive the backing of the peasantry, artisans, and petty bourgeoisie."<sup>15</sup> Through alliances with these organizations of the people, the MNR was able to overthrow the military junta.

Once the party was in power a series of important reforms were put into place under the presidencies of Víctor Paz Estenssoro. The tin mines were nationalized, universal suffrage was passed, and significant land reform laws appeased the populace for a period of time. Peasant trade unions were established and everyone was supposed to have access to free education. The new Bolivian state was working hard to placate the peasants and proletariats that had helped bring them in to power. They were, surely, also interested in retaining the political support and cooperation with powerful unions run by miners and tradesmen in the rural areas. Although this relative calm under the guise of progress would not last, a foundation for social action had been put in place in the people's involvement in the revolution and in the sense of autonomy they gained as members of unions who were able to demonstrate collectively. They did see some positive results, even if though they would be squashed again by militaristic regimes who continued to violate human rights.

Even before the MNR was ousted by a military coup, the party stopped fulfilling the people's needs. Domitila Barrios de Chungara, a female activist and wife of a tin miner living in Siglo XX writes in her testimony about how she feels the People's Revolutionary Movement let the her people down. She states:

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<sup>15</sup> Hylton and Thomson, *Revolutionary Horizons*, 76.

That government called itself “revolutionist” and we had put them into office, but...the nationalization of the mines was badly done, the company was terribly impoverished by the indemnification, and the people were deceived....But our MNR governments didn’t want to listen to us; instead, through the U.S. Embassy, they made plans and imposed their policies...In those days, we suffered quite a lot in Siglo XX because of their policies.<sup>16</sup>

As early as 1956, the Bolivian economy was already failing and the country adopted economic policies favorable to U.S. and other foreign investment and accepted by international lenders such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Workers began to lose their newly achieved rights, wages were frozen, people were fired to in order to satisfy budget cuts, and unions and union leaders were heavily controlled and monitored. When Estenssoro was overthrown in 1964 by a coup led by his vice-president, General Rene Barrientos, a long period of about twenty years was defined by a succession of militaristic dictators. People were massacred and discontent grew. Opposition to outward violations of both human and worker’s rights gained momentum at this time. New organizations, such as the Housewives’ Committee that branched throughout multiple mines, formed and established unions kept a foothold in popularity. Aymara campesino groups, like the Independent Confederation of Bolivian Rural Workers (CSUTCB), were founded and indigenous intellectuals and students formed the Katarista movement.<sup>17</sup> These multiple forms of opposition only ensured strong foundations for resistance in the future.

The economic policies of the 1960s and 1970s did little to help the economy and, by 1985, when the MNR was again in power under Estenssoro the economy was in shambles. The

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<sup>16</sup> Domitila Barrios de Chungara with Moema Viezzer, *Let Me Speak! Testimony of Domitila a Woman of the Bolivian Mines*, (New York: Monthly Review, 1978)

<sup>17</sup> Jose Antonio Lucero, *Struggles of Voice: the Politics of Indigenous Representation in the Andes*, (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh, 2008)

debt crisis of the 1980s hit Bolivia especially hard because of the collapse of the price of tin along with the years of political corruption. Neo-liberal structural adjustment policies were introduced which did away with the social and nationalistic achievements of the 1952 Revolution “in a single stroke.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, poor peasants were put out of work both in agriculture and in the mines. Hyper-inflation was controlled but at a great cost to the people. The tin mines were privatized and large numbers of displaced workers were located to urban centers such as La Paz, or went to the Yungas region and the Chapare, the core areas of coca farming, where the future Aymara president would begin his social leadership.<sup>19</sup>

### **Building the Post-Neoliberal Nation: Indigenous Mobilization and Leadership**

Evo Morales, the Aymara president of Bolivia since 2006, was born in 1959 to a peasant family who herded llamas in the antiplano in the department of Oruro. After a prolonged drought in the early 80s, like many other “colonizers,” he had to move to the Chapare (Cochabamba) to grow oranges, bananas, and coca, upon which he joined the *cocalero* (coca growers) union. After being elected both the general secretary of the Tropical Federation of coca growers and the larger Six Tropical Federations,<sup>20</sup> Evo Morales was elected to Congress as a candidate for the Movement towards Socialism (MAS) party in 1997.

Morales’ successful leadership was the expression of Neo-liberalism’s failure in Bolivia. The United States policies towards Bolivia, largely represented by the ‘War on Drugs’ campaigns and its ‘zero cocaine’ slogan, in full effect after the former dictator Hugo Banzer was elected president in 1997, were threatening the livelihood of *cocaleros* that supported Morales’s

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<sup>18</sup> Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, “The Roots of Rebellion II: Reclaiming the Nation,” *NACLA Report on the Americas*, 38:4 (2004) 20.

<sup>19</sup> Lucero, *Struggles of Voice*, 87-90.

<sup>20</sup> Hylton and Thomson, *Revolutionary Horizons*, 129-30.

radical opposition to the eradication of coca. Formerly state-owned resource companies such as gas, oil, tin mines, the railroads, and even water rights were being sold off to private and foreign companies and national resources were being shipped out of the country. Foreign investors raised the rates of basic commodities for Bolivians, taking up a large portion of people's income. As a result, Quechua and Aymara indigenous groups all over the country, along with the poor populace in general, were in a state of rising discontent that culminated in a series of social movements towards revolution in the first five years of the new millennia.

One of these rate increases sparked the first mass indigenous movement in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the city of Cochabamba. The 'Water Wars' were brought about by the increase in rates by the private company Bechtel after they had bought the contract to privatize the city's water system in 1999. After the people realized that they could not pay for an essential resource that was being controlled by a multimillion dollar international company, they began to protest. Historian Benjamin Dangl states, "Citizens were defiant. Instead of paying their increased water bills, they burned them in the plaza."<sup>21</sup> The city was blockaded and the protestors were persistent from November of 1999 to April 2000 as the citizens of Cochabamba were linked by their solidarity. The issue went to the courts and the control of water was eventually handed back into national hands after Bechtel's contract was cancelled when the issue went to parliament.<sup>22</sup>

In 2003, another step in the road to revolution arose over the control of natural gas and began in the revolutionary cities of La Paz and El Alto in the highlands surrounding the capital city but eventually spread all over the country. Beginning in July, blockades propagated across the country against the proposed plans to export Bolivia's natural gas to Chile. By October,

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<sup>21</sup> Benjamin Dangl, *The Price of Fire: Resource Wars and Social Movements in Bolivia*, (Oakland: Ca.AK Press. 2007) 64,

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 68.

workers in El Alto went on general strike, as did the miners in Potosí. Throughout the country, people were being killed in the process of protecting their rights to use their natural resources at an affordable rate. People from all around the world participated in hunger strikes protesting the violations of human rights in Bolivia. Peasant and indigenous groups alike demanded that the president, “Goni” Sánchez Lozada resign along with those closest to him in the government; they demanded a trial for those who killed civilian protestors, the reversal of the privatization of hydrocarbons, and a new constitutional assembly. President Sánchez Lozada resigned on October 17, 2003.<sup>23</sup>

His vice president, Carlos Mesa, took office but was continually pressured by the groups who had protested in both the water and gas war. By June of 2005 a new Hydrocarbons law had passed in congress that raised the revenues that the government earned from gas but did not nationalize it like much of the indigenous populous had called for in 2003. Again, cities like Cochabamba, La Paz, and especially El Alto, citizens gathered in protest because none of the demands that they had called for in 2003 had been met. Breaking under threats of occupation on the presidential palace, Carlos Mesa resigned. Roadways were blockaded and the country’s access to commerce was put in a stand still. Indigenous protestors blocked access to resources by taking over water, gas, hydroelectric, and petroleum facilities throughout the country. Finally, at the end of June, the decision was made that general elections for the presidency would be held at the end of the year.<sup>24</sup> At the end of a long five years of almost constant mass mobilization, the people would have a chance to decide who would lead their country.

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<sup>23</sup> Hylton and Thomson, *Revolutionary Horizons*, 110-18.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 124-125.

The results of the December elections in 2006 were unprecedented in the history of democratic elections in Bolivia and in Latin America as a whole. With over eighty percent of voters showing up at the polls, Evo Morales became the first indigenous president with 53.74% of the popular vote.<sup>25</sup> This was a momentous win. In previous elections candidates had gained the presidency with much lower majorities. Morales attempted to satisfy the indigenous masses by taking steps to fulfill his campaign promises. Loosening the grip of neo-liberal policies, the administration nationalized key energy resources like gas and oil. *Yacimientos Petroliferos Fiscales Bolivianos* (YPFB), a state owned oil and gas company, would now share profits with private companies still operating in the country, increasing revenue from the state.

The extension of new rights to indigenous groups in a new constitution became the single major accomplishment of the new administration. In January of 2009, after years of turmoil surrounding its passage through opposition in the “media luna” departments like Pando and Santa Cruz, where the strongest opposition to Morales is concentrated, the constitution was passed by the people in a general referendum. Bolivia’s 2009 constitution redefined the nation as a plurinational state, which incorporates “all human collectives that share cultural identity, language, historical traditions, institutions, territoriality, and cosmovision and whose existence is anterior to the Spanish colonial invasion.”<sup>26</sup> Introducing the transition of the nation from a colonial and neoliberal past to a plurinational future, the pre-Columbian indigenous ideals of reciprocity and complementarity feature prominently, foregrounding the major changes that indigenous peoples have begun to implement, which are discussed next.

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<sup>25</sup> Bolivia: Electoral Results, 2005. *Political Database of the Americas* - Georgetown University. Web. 12 Mar. 2010. <<http://pdba.georgetown.edu/Elecdata/Bolivia/bolivia.html>>.

<sup>26</sup> Gustafson, Bret. “Manipulating Cartographies: Plurinationalism, Autonomy, and Indigenous Resurgence in Bolivia,” *Anthropological Quarterly*. (82:4, 2009) 1004.

## Social Change in the Bolivian Post-Neoliberal Era

One of the most outward forms of change for indigenous people in Bolivia can be seen in the gender orientation of the political system. In January of 2010, Evo Morales was re-elected and he also overhauled his cabinet, distributing posts equally between women and men. Three of the ten women who now comprise Morale's cabinet are indigenous social activists. Women, who were once fighting for their rights through protest, are now in charge of government ministries of justice and rural development and land. Optimistically, through these posts, the former leaders of the Bartolina Sisa Federation of peasant women will be able to evoke change for their fellow countrymen and women.<sup>27</sup> Women are also increasing in numbers in other facets of the government. This is important since indigenous women were key supporters of MAS in the previous two presidential elections. In the constitutional assembly that was comprised of 1/3 women, an indigenous woman, Silvia Lazarte, presided as president. Ana María Romero de Compero, a former human rights activist, was elected in the past election and now heads the senate, a position a woman has never held before.<sup>28</sup> Now, it is the task of these women to work within the government and with indigenous groups to usher in the implementation of the new rights set down in the constitution such as sexual and reproductive freedom and education so that poor indigenous women will be aware of their new possibilities.

According to some non-governmental organization (NGO) studies, indigenous women have been making steps towards progress in the past couple of years. On the website for the group named MADRE, an international human rights organization based in New York City, a group of indigenous women are presented in a photograph, marching down a road in traditional

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<sup>27</sup> Franz Chavez, "BOLIVIA: Unprecedented Gender Parity in Cabinet." IPS - Inter Press Service, January 27, 2010, <http://www.proquest.com.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu/> (accessed March 12, 2010).

<sup>28</sup> "Women gain political influence." *Latin America regional reports Andean Group*. London: Latin American Newsletters. January, 2010, 6.

dress and holding a *whipala*, a flag whose checkered rainbow pattern signifies the vast array of indigenous identities in the Andes. The organization held workshops for indigenous women throughout the country within the past year advocating female leadership in politics, teaching them skills that would help them in both campaigning and in working within the legislative process, if they were elected. According to the organization, six indigenous women whom they helped to train were elected to parliament in the elections of December 2009.<sup>29</sup>

This example is not only relevant because indigenous women are gaining more power in government, but because they appeared self empowered culturally with visual displays of their own traditions and values. In the year that preceded the passage of the constitutional referendum, there were demonstrations throughout the country showing mass support. Journalist Alan Taylor of Boston.com compiled photographs taking during this time where the masses, again, were coming together, demonstrating and urging the government to put the fate of the constitution in their hands by passing a law to put it up for referendum so that their fate would, in some ways, be in their own hands.<sup>30</sup> The article includes photographs of indigenous Bolivians gathering outside the National Congress, in plazas around the nation, and in a march to La Paz in October 2008, with thousands of people, banners and *whipalas* in hand. The same people who pushed out the two previous presidents, and who protested in 2000 and in 2003, continue to represent themselves. Through these visual representations and mass participation, indigenous Bolivians are constructing the notions and symbols of indigeneity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and it seems that they will continue to be the catalysts of change in the new Bolivia.

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<sup>29</sup> "Bolivia: Demanding a Political Voice for Women." *MADRE :: Demanding Rights, Resources & Results for Women Worldwide*. Web. 20 Mar. 2010. <<http://www.madre.org/index.php?s=2&b=20&p=147>>.

<sup>30</sup> Alan Taylor, "Bolivia and Its New Constitution - The Big Picture," *Boston.com*. Web. 12 Mar. 2010.<[http://www.boston.com/bigpicture/2009/02/bolivia\\_and\\_its\\_new\\_constituti.html](http://www.boston.com/bigpicture/2009/02/bolivia_and_its_new_constituti.html)>



Efforts have also been made to redirect national resources to further the higher educational and future career prospects for the young indigenous population with a pluricultural orientation. In August 2008, Morales signed Supreme Decree No. 29664 which set aside funds generated by the hydrocarbons to create three specifically indigenous universities which would offer courses in both ‘western’ based subjects as well as more ‘traditional’ forms of instruction.<sup>31</sup> These universities went on to be founded in three regions throughout the country, each one specializing in one of the three indigenous languages, Aymara, Quechua, and Guarani. In Warista, the students taught in Aymara receive instruction in history and learn about the legacy of their university’s namesake, Túpac Katari. But they also get degrees in areas like food engineering to serve their communities with the degrees that they earn there.<sup>32</sup>

### **The Challenges and the Hurdles**

There are certainly factions who continue to oppose Evo Morales and the MAS government in power. There is a jagged line drawn down the middle of the country that separates the eastern “media luna” departments who are home to many of the rich land owning elites and the western departments where most of the population has lived, historically, where the poor peasantry as well as the urban poor have inhabited much of the space. In the past two years, Santa Cruz, the wealthy oil producer region, has attempted to secede from Bolivia. Its conservative representatives in the legislative system have voted systematically against the government. Despite the governmental reforms of the recent years, the nation is definitely not at peace. In September of 2008 in the department of Pando, 19 peasant protestors died and others

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<sup>31</sup> Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues: Ninth Session. From the provisional agenda of the Report on Bolivia from the United Nations Economic and Social Council  
<<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/E.C.19.2010.12%201%20EN.pdf>>

<sup>32</sup> Victor Sancho, "Knowhow of Andean Peoples on Offer at Bolivia Universities." *Latin American Herald Tribune*. Web. 15 March 2010. <<http://www.laht.com/article.asp?ArticleId=342476&CategoryId=14919>>

were injured demonstrating against possible land seizures and, a year later, those who attacked them were still not brought to justice.<sup>33</sup> Violence committed by both sides of the regional divide continues to arise, between and among indigenous peoples.

## Conclusions

In the aftermath of massive demonstrations in 2000 and 2003, Bolivia remains an ever changing nation. Starting at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and continuing to the present day, a new modality of nation building has been put into action. Using their newly found power in areas of government, the electoral process, constitutional discussion and reform, and through mass mobilizations and conscious participation in virtually all facets of the changing nation, Bolivians who have lacked the power of permanent change in the past are finally grasping it on their own. It will perhaps take years to know what the true implications of this “third revolution” will be for the Bolivia. There is evidence that change is underway through the continuing efforts of grassroots organizations and the cooperation of indigenous organizations and the state. The language of the new constitution seems to be ushering in gradual social change. Long-established Andean ideals such as *pachakuti* give indigenous Bolivians the consciousness that there must be a period of sacrifice and chaos before they may reach a moment of peace and stability. It remains to be seen whether or not there will be permanent change, socially, economically, and politically, for the indigenous poor. There are so many factors that are still impeding progress. One thing is certain. Indigenous peoples, now in power like never before in a country where they have always been the majority and have been oppressed for over 500 years, will never again accept the status quo and will continue to stand up for what is inherently theirs.

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<sup>33</sup> "Victims of the Pando Massacre Still Await Justice." *Amnesty International*. Web. 25 Mar. 2010.  
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